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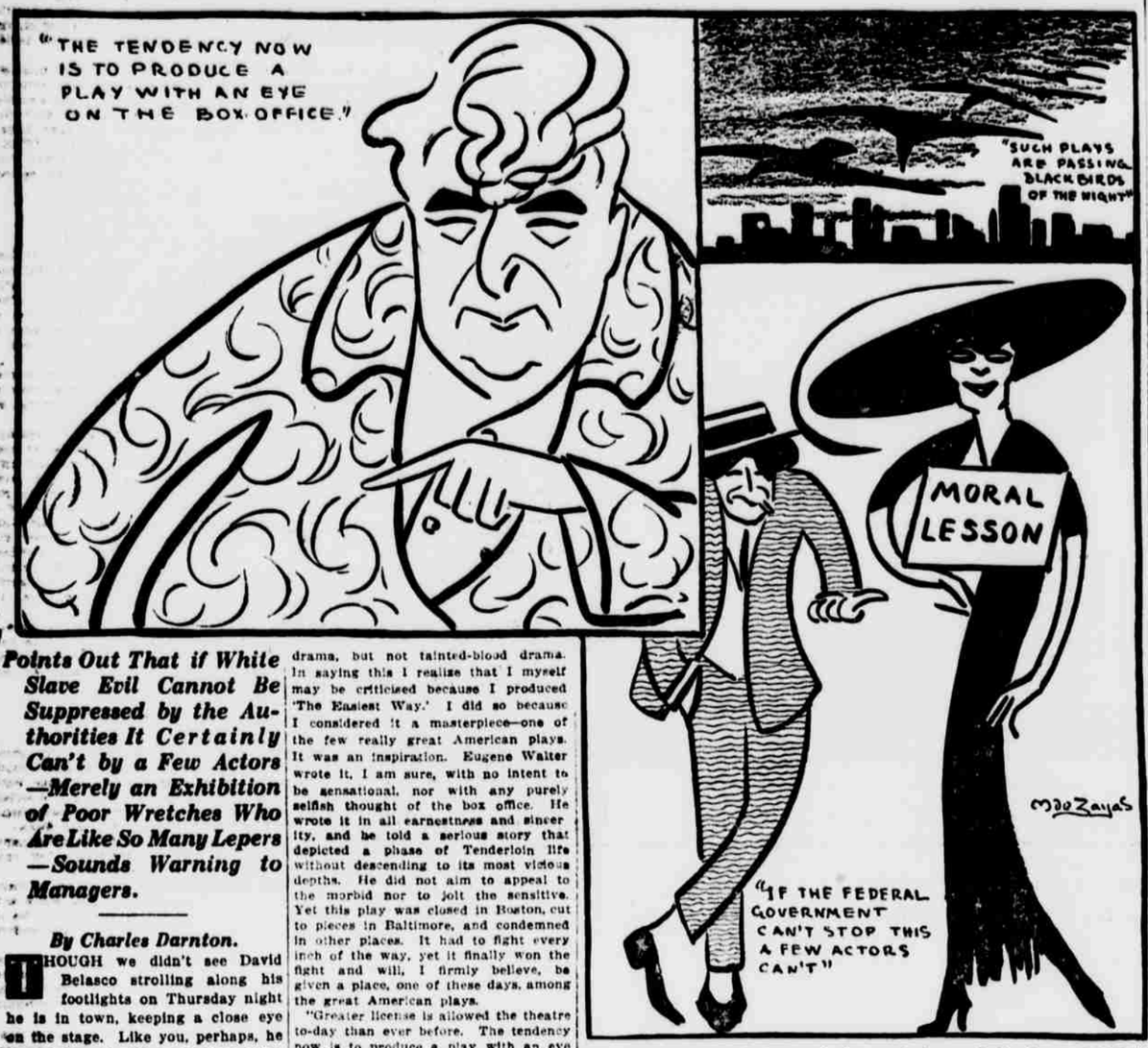
No Excuse for Vicious Red-Light Play On the Stage, Declares David Belasco



Points Out That if White Slave Evil Cannot Be Suppressed by the Authorities It Certainly Can't by a Few Actors —Merely an Exhibition of Poor Wretches Who Are Like So Many Lepers —Sounds Warning to Managers.

By Charles Darnton.

THOUGH we didn't see David Belasco strolling along his footlights on Thursday night he is in town, keeping a close eye on the stage. Like you, perhaps, he is watching it with more than ordinary interest, now that the police have been pressed into service as dramatic critics. He believes it is high time for managers to sit up and take notice of conditions. He believes they should be the first to guard their own field. He believes they should protect the public from poisoned plays. I am simply giving you his opinion as he gave it to me. You need not be told that it is the opinion of a man who knows the theatre as you know your own threshold. If any man lives in it and for it, that man is David Belasco. This may sound like a speech, but it isn't. It's the truth. Every man-Jack, or woman-Gill, of us must admit it. And that's why David Belasco's words at this time are worth their weight in type. Here they are:

"The brothel play is a mistake. I have not seen the plays responsible for the present agitation, but I feel justified in saying there is no excuse for any play that has a disorderly house for one of its scenes. I like red-blood drama, but not tainted-blood drama. In saying this I realize that I myself may be criticised because I produced 'The Easiest Way.' I did so because I considered it a masterpiece—one of the few really great American plays. It was an inspiration. Eugene Walter wrote it, I am sure, with no intent to be sensational, nor with any purely selfish thought of the box office. He wrote it in all earnestness and sincerity, and he told a serious story that depicted a phase of Tenderloin life without descending to its most vicious depths. He did not aim to appeal to the morbid nor to jolt the sensitive. Yet this play was closed in Boston, cut to pieces in Baltimore, and condemned in other places. It had to fight every inch of the way, yet it finally won the fight and will, I firmly believe, be given a place, one of these days, among the great American plays.

"Greater license is allowed the theatre to-day than ever before. The tendency now is to produce a play with an eye on the box office alone. Nothing, in the end, could be more disastrous to the theatre, which depends for its support upon a public that may be quick to turn against it. Faith must be kept with that public; it must feel that the theatre is an institution that can be trusted and respected.

"In my opinion, as I have already said, the brothel should not be shown on the stage, nor should painted women and their even worse associates be paraded before the public. No real argument can be made for the red-light drama, no good can come of it. Surely if the Federal authorities cannot suppress the white slave evil, a few actors on the stage can't. Nothing of value is taught by the 'moral lesson' of a play that makes an insincere appeal. Such a play merely exhibits poor wretches as it might so many lepers. Even Bernard Shaw, with all his brilliancy, could not gild a pill that the public would swallow. If the public today is 'educated' up to the point where it will accept plays so brutally frank as to be positively shocking, what can be the future of the theatre?

"There was a time when the great actors and great actresses of this country could scarcely draw enough money to the theatre to pay their board bills. And why? Because the theatre was believed to be the house of the devil. When the actors came to town housewives snatched their clothes off the line in the yard and kept their girls in doors. For years the theatre and its people struggled against a prejudice as unjust as it was ridiculous, and only by untiring artistic effort that finally won the respect, as well as the admiration, of the public was this prejudice overcome. All this work—the work of years—may now be undone by plays that shock the public. I have studied that public long and carefully. I know how the theatre may woo and win it—and also lose it.

"The 'movies' won a part of that public when pictures were first given because those pictures told pretty, wholesome stories. But since the 'movies' turned to the sensational and sometimes the vicious phases of life there has been a change. This has helped to bring back our galleries and our balconies in a measure. But if our stage is deluged with red-light plays we cannot hope to hold our own. From such an injury the theatre could not recover in years. But I do not believe this will happen. Such plays are merely blackbirds that pass in the night, and unless I am greatly mistaken they will soon disappear.

"I intend to produce a play myself this season that deals with criminals, but this play makes no attempt to popularize or glorify them, nor does it descend to viciousness. The great thing to me is that it has a big thought behind it—Is there a cure for crime? If so, what is it? No matter what the fate of this play may be—and I'm not depending upon heroes or heroines, nor justifying errors made—I shall be satisfied if it helps the public generally, and I hope the Federal authorities particularly, to find the cause of crime and then to find the cure. The argument set forth is that crime, after all, is nothing more than the result of perverted thought. I've had this play in my hands for four years, so it cannot be said I am following 'crook' plays. It seems to me that at last the time for it has come, especially as attention has recently been called to conditions in Sing Sing.

"To get back to the red-light play, I am convinced that it teaches nothing. It is vile, nauseating and dangerous. In dealing with it we must first rely upon the discretion of managers. After that it is up to the critics. The regrettable thing is that condemnation of such a play by the critics often serves as advertising. This whole question is one that the Theatrical Managers' Association might well consider, for its own good if not for that of the public. Let the theatre keep the good name it has struggled so hard to win!"

"I'm Head Salesman in a Glove House," Says Eddie Foy, "and I'm Showing My Kids"

EDDIE FOY AND SEVEN LITTLE FOYS.

"Train 'Em?" Asks the Comedian, Who Heads "His Own Company," the Seven Little Foys; "I Didn't Train 'Em—That's the Way We Have Our Fun at Home" —And Just for Good Measure "Mother" Also Appears in the Act.

Have you seen Eddie Foy and his own company?

It's his own company, all right, for it's his own family. They're doing a stunt this week at Keith's, in Union Square. Seven kids and Eddie. Well, maybe Bryan, who is seventeen, might object to being called a kid, for he's a pretty husky lad, and Charley, who crowds Bryan close for age, wouldn't for a minute stand the kid class. But there's Dick, who is thirteen; Mary, twelve; Madeline, eleven; Eddie, seven, and Irving, five—they're kiddies, all right.

"Train 'em?" says Eddie. "I didn't train them; that's the way we have our fun at home."

And home is New Rochelle. And the home of the Foys must be some home. It's a happy little family that frisks about the stage. The merry youngsters just twine themselves about your heart. You long to hug them there and as you wipe the tears their fun has brought to the eyes, you gasp: "You little rascals!"

The little sketch holds the audience. And after awhile it can't hold them. The people just rise and cheer the antics of the youngsters. Oh! they are cute, and they are as funny as their dad. And they don't get a show in New York, for the Gerry Society won't let the little ones act; won't let them sing or dance. And their movements reveal the fact that they can both sing and dance. But they just help father. They give a recitative. Yes, that's what Eddie told Magistrate Breen in the early summer when he was haled to court for letting little Mary sing.

"The Gerry Society is all right," said Eddie. "It struck me that I ought to be allowed to instruct my children in their father's profession, but there are many people who don't like to see children on the stage. The Gerry Society is looking after the welfare of the kiddies of New York, and you bet your life they are doing good work. As a man, having children of my own, I have to take my hat off to them."

Well, there's nothing in the little sketch of the Foys to which exception can be taken. They just frolic on the stage as they do in the house, and that's what makes you love them and holler for them. They love their dad, and the comedian, who has made the world laugh for nearly two generations, looks them over with pride and says to the audience, with his eyes:

"Now, what do you think of that?"

The kiddies have fun with Eddie, too, and maybe they don't get a hand for their fun. Their mother must have taught them those tricks. Six of them come on for a starter. Then the father counts noses and disappears. He returns with a carpetbag marked "Parcel Post." When he opens this Irving, the five-year-old, steps out and throws kisses to the audience. This gets the elder Foy's goat. At least, it apparently does. The little five-year-old is stealing his thunder, and Eddie pouts while the big laugh goes around the house.

Eddie is as funny as ever and sings as badly. He retains his reputation in both performances.

"I'm head salesman in a glove house," he says, "and I'm showing my kids."

That gets a laugh, and a storm follows when he tells the audience that if he moved to Flatbush he would make a city of it, so great would be the increase in population. Eddie stands on the short end of the family on the stage, and that makes the rest of the family look very small, for he towers over Irving, the five-year-old. And Irving looks up at him and makes wry faces. When the comedian gets a hand Irving bows and throws kisses to the audience. Father Foy is very much put out about that and the family get more laughs.

The kiddies line up and each does a little turn. Each has a talking part. Charley Foy is "the spit of his dad." Demure as a Sunday-school girl, he comes out of the line and murmurs that "the green grass grew all around." And the ladies whisper: "Isn't he cute, the little dear!" And as he walks about they smile. They watch his face and grin, then laugh and then holler. For he twists that little face of his into the well known mug of his dad. He's Eddie Foy the Second for fair. The little imp is funnier than the whole monkey house in Central Park.

The family is dressed in white, all except the father, whose attire, as usual, would keep Worth guessing in Paris. The boys are in white duck, the girls in white lawns and black stockings and shoes. The girls are just darlings, and you can't help wishing they were yours. When the holy innocents roll their eyes at their adored daddy, and put one over on father, it's good-night to the peace of the audience. When the kiddies trip off the stage after their dainty act, with curtsies and kisses, and Father Foy in the rear, the audience yells for more.

Then Eddie kneels to the audience, and the family trips out and each kiddy kisses him as he or she dances past him. And they're off again. Oh! more of that! more of that! demands the audience. That one little touch has them all by the heart. It's the handkerchief for the ladies and the big hand for the men. And Eddie has to make one of his familiar speeches.

I thank you for your kindness to the kids," he says. "I was going to bring their mother, only the stage wasn't big enough"—

And the laugh is nipped in the bud, and turned to more applause when the young ones run out a la "ring around a rosy," with their mother in their midst. Once Mrs. Foy was known to the big stage as Morango the dancer. She danced for two years in the Empire Theatre in London. For two years she danced in the Grand Opera House in Paris. She danced in the extravaganzas of the late Dave Henderson. She danced into the heart of Eddie Foy, and hasn't danced since Bryan was born.

She gets her share of the applause, then Eddie has to make a real speech. He again thanks the audience for the kind reception to the kids, and feels a tug at his skirts. Little Irving is doing the tugging. With one of those wonderful faces with which he laughed himself into fame, the comedian looks inquiringly down.

"Father," says the kiddy, "mother says to come home." And that breaks up the show.

"Well," said Eddie, after the show, "they say that actors can't have any domestic life. I defy the alligator. Does that bunch look like race suicide? Of course their mother had to give up her profession when the babies came. But she was willing. Her life was different after that, and if she hasn't made a good mother show me.

"As to the children going on the stage—well, the stage is my profession. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a lawyer. I'm not a writer. I am an actor. In all other professions men like to have their sons follow their course in life. They can prepare their children for their future from the cradle. Society in New York won't permit me to do that, and acting is the only profession I can teach my children, and I think that my profession is becoming more appreciated and more highly esteemed every day. The prejudice which existed against the stage in former years is almost entirely dissipated.

"Next week I appear in Washington, then go to Philadelphia. Where I go my family go with me. The children's mother is always with them and we have a woman tutor who travels with them. If any of the children want to adopt my profession, I want to give them all the training possible. If they don't take to it, I want to make them sick of it."

That from Eddie Foy, who has been serving laughs to the public for the last thirty years or more.

"I want to be a singer and do serious work on the stage," said Bryan, his eldest son.

"I want to be Eddie Foy the Second," spoke up Charlie, who is Eddie in the embryo.

Came 6,000 Miles to See a New York Fire and Hasn't Seen One Yet--'Fancy That Now'

That's the Fix of Major Waller, Chief of the Fire Department of Alexandria, Egypt—"I Got All the Alarms at My Hotel," Says He, "But When I Got to the Fires, the Fires Were Out, Don't You See?"

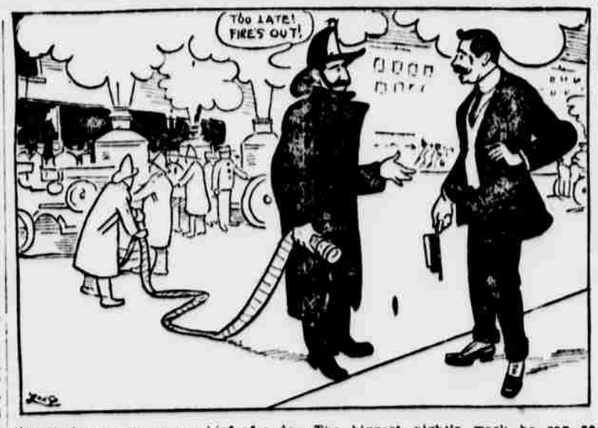
It does not appear on the minutes of the International Association of Fire Engineers, which has been in session at the Grand Central Palace all this week, but it is nevertheless true that one of the visitors crossed 6,000 miles of black water expressly to see the famous New York Fire Department put out a fire and will go back next week with his ambition still ungratified.

This is E. T. Waller, Chief of the Fire Department of Alexandria, Egypt, a fine, upstanding Briton of military bearing who among his neighbors is known by the unpretending title of Shagbeolegaast, which is Arabic for major. Let him tell his own story in his own way:

"Of course, you know, I have always heard of the wonderful work of the New York Fire Department, and I fancied it was worth while to take my leave to attend this convention and see it at work. Very well, then: I made arrangements at my hotel to get all the alarms, and every time the gong has sounded I've started out to see the fire. Sometimes I've lost my way. For instance, only last night I got away down to the bottom of West Thirty-three street—yes, of course, Thirty-third—and just as I was stepping off into the West—no, of course, the North—River a bobby told me the fire was in East Thirty-third street. And when I had arrived at the bottom of East Thirty-three street I met the engines coming back. The fire was out, don't you see?

"I've tried taking the trams, too, but your fellows are too fast for me. They always have the fire out before I arrive. I begin to doubt whether I shall ever see them at work. Fancy that, now!"

Mr. Waller is fully convinced that if fires in New York run true to form he is due to see the department at work on a tremendous conflagration—if he can only wait long enough. Our hazards, he thinks, are enormous. The trouble is he has engaged passage to England on the 10th. He returns that way, being, as has been said, an Englishman,



though for twenty years chief of a department of 135 native fellaheen in the Egyptian city at the delta of the Nile.

These blacks he finds to be natural born smoke eaters—brave, docile and ready to tackle anything so long as there is a white man by to boss the job. He races his motor up and down the eighteen miles of water front and sometimes has $20,000,000 worth of cotton to his mind to protect from fire. The biggest night's work he can remember in his twenty years is five alarms—not quite enough to make Chief Kenlon turn over in his sleep.

When it gets hot in Alexandria it is enough to make this week in New York look like a hoar frost in an ice box. But Mr. Waller says he wears a tarboosh on work days and his men go through that tropical heat, racing to fires clad in brass helmets and top boots, after the fashion of the London brigade.

There's your Britisher for you!

Why Zeno, the Strong Man, Changed His Name

While honeymooning through town a few days ago, Dexter Fellows, the circus press agent who knows more persons by their front names than any man in the United States, told this one:

"The circus pays off every Saturday in alphabetical order. On the list are more than a thousand names. This was bad for Zeno, the strong man who got his about sundown after hanging around hopefully a whole afternoon. Zeno was sore on the arrangement but had no redress.

"This spring, he showed up ready for a contract. The agent spotted him and passed out this welcome hail, 'Hello Zeno, going to join out again?' The strong man didn't even hesitate.

"'Zeno nothing!' he exclaimed.

"'Why isn't your name Zeno, the strong man?'

"'No. It's Ajax. Let some other boob do the waiting this year.'"

LETS IT SHINE.

Baker—Puffer doesn't believe in hiding his light under a bushel.

Hamilton—I should say he doesn't. He puts it in front of a reflector.—Newark News.

A Hair Raising Contract

"We all remember how the Czar of Russia laid down a ruler and stated that that was the way he wanted the railroad built from Petersburg to Moscow," said John A. Morris, the owner of Morris Park race track, at a dinner on board his steam yacht Cora. "But perhaps you don't know how he looked upon the enormous cost of construction (named in the contract made for its building) to be paid to the contractors, Smith Brothers of Baltimore.

"At one time while the road was being built some representatives of another country were at the Court of Russia and the Czar gave instructions that they should be shown all of the great sights, for he wished to impress upon them the greatness of Russia, its wealth and its undertakings. When his attaches reported to him daily they were asked from time to time 'Did you show them the Kremlin?' 'Yes, Your Highness.' 'And were they astonished?' 'No, Your Highness.' He asked, 'Have you shown them the Great Bell?' 'Yes, Your Highness.' 'And were they astonished?' 'No, Your Highness,' and so on, naming all the great sights near, one after another. This went on for several days until at last there seemed nothing else to have them shown, and with a sigh he turned to the court officer saying, 'Well, I suppose we shall have to do it. So show them the contract with Smith Bros. of Baltimore and if that doesn't astonish them nothing ever will.'"

Edwin Booth as an Audience

The late Bishop Potter of the Episcopal Church and Edwin Booth, the actor, were very great friends, and the Bishop in telling of his first meeting Mr. Booth said: "I was preaching a sermon at Newport, R. I., and it was a very hot summer's day. The door of the church was open and I noticed a gentleman get up from a rear pew and [illegible] and sit down on the doorstep, but thought nothing of it until after a while I realized that I was talking to this man only. When the services were over I found out that he was Edwin Booth—that I by some unknown influence had been drawn to speak to him—as if my sermon was to him alone."